

## **Making Healthy Choices – A Health Action Campaign Guide**

We all know we should do more of the things that are good for us. For example, we know that exercise and a healthy diet are good for our health, while smoking and too much alcohol are bad. The challenge is often turning what we *know* into what we *do*.

Whether it's quitting smoking, eating less sugar, exercising more or losing weight, making positive changes that are sustainable isn't always as easy as it sounds. Knowing which approaches have been proven to help change our behaviour can be a good starting point. Here are some examples:

### **1. Find a personal motivation**

Studies, [like this one on the Drinkaware app](#), have shown that behaviour change initiatives – such as health apps or counselling programmes – tend to be more effective if you are already committed to making a change. So, find a personal motivation to ensure you're the one driving the lifestyle change. You're more likely to be successful if you're already committed to making changes. Maintain a clear focus on the end goal and why it's important to you on a personal level – for instance for you, your family or your career.

### **2. Have confidence in your ability to make a change**

Once you've decided you want to change something about your lifestyle, it's important to have confidence in your ability to make that change to reach the desired outcome. It's what psychologists call [Self-efficacy](#) and is a key part of the [Health Belief Model](#). Setting goals and seeking support or guidance can really help with this.

### **3. Set SMART goals and measure success**

Rome wasn't built in a day. Setting SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and with a clear Time frame) can help. You can set SMART goals for most types of health behaviour, like how much exercise you aim to take, weight you plan to lose, portions of fruit and vegetables to eat – or conversely how much you're going to reduce your consumption of alcohol, junk food or cigarettes.

You can then track your progress. Because you'll be able to see how much you've achieved as you move closer to your end goal this can help you maintain your healthy lifestyle. You can self-monitor with apps and online tools, or simply using a notebook and pen. Reminding yourself of how far you've come can help reboot motivation if you're feeling like giving up.

### **4. Find what works for you**

[A range of behaviour change interventions can help](#) you keep on track. These include health and fitness classes, support groups, counselling, subscribing to motivational texts and emails and using a health app. Find out which of these work best for you.

## **5. Seek support from those around you**

Support from your family and friends can really help with long-term health behaviour change. So make sure the people close to you understand that you're serious about making a change and know how they can help. Teaming up with others towards a shared goal can also be really beneficial, so consider joining a support group or finding an online community with the same goals as you. [Public Health England and the NHS](#) recognise that connected and empowered communities are healthy communities.

## **6. Be flexible to stay on track**

Effective behaviour change isn't just about eating better or walking more for a few weeks. It's also about keeping up those changes long term. [One recent study](#) explored exercising psychological flexibility as a means to achieving long term results. This means accepting and managing difficult thoughts or feelings to help you better regulate your behaviour. For example, a person on a diet might learn to be mindful and *observe* an urge to eat a chocolate cake without necessarily attempting to *get rid* of that urge. The idea is that you're able to make changes that are consistent with your chosen values (i.e. having a healthy lifestyle) even when faced with difficult thoughts, emotions, or temptations.

These are some broad initial guidelines, based on health behaviour change research. In 2019 we'll focus on specific examples, including:

- Why bother to change?
- Changing your diet
- Getting fit and moving more
- Looking after your mental health
- Quitting smoking
- Alcohol and Drugs
- Losing Weight

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